

O 041119Z SEP 97
FM AMEMBASSY DHAKA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8518
USDOC WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0134
USCINCPAC HONOLULU HI//J45/J3/J31/J4/J5/J513//
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
DIA WASHDC//DH3//
AMEMBASSY LONDON
CIA
NSC WASHDC
AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 DHAKA 004187

STATE ALSO FOR EB/ESC, INR/SA, DRL
USDOC FOR 4530 ITA/ANESA/OSA, 6000 ADVOCACY CENTER
ISLAMABAD PLEASE ALSO PASS TO A/S INDERFURTH

E.O. 12958: 9/4/07

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S INTRODUCTORY MEETING WITH
BANGLADESH PRIME MINISTER SHEIKH HASINA

1. (U) CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR JOHN HOLZMAN. REASON
1.5 (D).

2. (C) SUMMARY: PRIME MINISTER SHEIKH HASINA USED
HER INTRODUCTORY MEETING WITH AMBASSADOR HOLZMAN TO
PRESS HARD FOR A PRESIDENTIAL VISIT TO BANGLADESH.
SHE SAID THAT SHE, AND THE PEOPLE OF BANGLADESH, "ARE
EXPECTING A VISIT BY THE PRESIDENT." FOREIGN
SECRETARY FAROOQ SOBHAN ADDED THAT WHAT HE PERCEIVED
TO BE A RECENT "GOLDEN AGE" IN U.S.-BANGLADESHI
RELATIONS WOULD BE DISRUPTED IF THE PRESIDENT DECIDED
NOT TO COME. THE PRIME MINISTER ASSURED THE
AMBASSADOR THAT THERE WOULD BE ABSOLUTE FAIRNESS IN
THE EVALUATIONS OF THE CURRENT ROUND OF GAS BIDS, AND
ADDED THAT SHE WOULD ENDEAVOR TO ACCELERATE THE
APPROVAL PROCESS FOR THE UNOCAL PRODUCTION-SHARING
CONTRACT (PSC), SO THAT THE AGREEMENT COULD BE SIGNED
DURING A/S INDERFURTH'S VISIT NEXT WEEK. THE PRIME
MINISTER THANKED THE U.S. FOR ASSISTING WITH THE
PROTECTION OF HER FAMILY MEMBERS. END SUMMARY.

3. (C) ON SEPTEMBER 3, AMBASSADOR HOLZMAN,
ACCOMPANIED BY DCM TED NIST (NOTETAKER), PAID AN
INTRODUCTORY CALL ON PRIME MINISTER SHEIKH HASINA.
ALSO IN ATTENDANCE WERE FOREIGN SECRETARY FAROOQ
SOBHAN, MFA AMERICAS AND PACIFIC DIRECTOR GENERAL
ASHRAF UD-DOULA, PRINCIPAL SECRETARY TO THE PRIME
MINISTER S.A. SAMAD, PRESS SECRETARY TO THE PRIME
MINISTER JAWADUL KARIM, AND ASSISTANT PRIVATE
SECRETARY TO THE PRIME MINISTER IBRAHEEM HOSEIN KHAN.

"WE EXPECT YOUR PRESIDENT TO COME TO BANGLADESH"

4. (C) FOLLOWING AN EXCHANGE OF PLEASANTRIES,
AMBASSADOR HOLZMAN DISCUSSED POSSIBLE VISITS TO THE
REGION BY U.S. OFFICIALS. HE OBSERVED THAT ASSISTANT
SECRETARY INDERFURTH WOULD BE COMING NEXT WEEK. HE
ADDED THAT BOTH PRESIDENT CLINTON AND SECRETARY
ALBRIGHT ARE CONSIDERING TRIPS TO THE REGION, BUT
STRESSED THAT NEITHER HAS DECIDED DEFINITELY TO COME
TO BANGLADESH. THE PRIME MINISTER RESPONDED "WE
EXPECT (PRESIDENT CLINTON) TO COME TO BANGLADESH."
SHE REMEMBERED FONDLY MRS. CLINTON'S TRIP TO
BANGLADESH IN 1995, AND THEIR EXPERIENCE IN FEBRUARY
AS CO-CHAIRS OF THE MICROCREDIT SUMMIT IN
WASHINGTON. SHE RECALLED HER "EXCELLENT MEETING"
WITH THE PRESIDENT AND MRS. CLINTON IN THE WHITE
HOUSE, AND SAID SHE APPRECIATED THE LETTER THE
PRESIDENT HAD SENT HER FOLLOWING THE DENVER ECONOMIC
SUMMIT. SHE NOTED THE "STRONG LINKS" THAT THE AWAMI
LEAGUE HAS WITH THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY, INCLUDING ITS

ASSISTANCE WITH FUND-RAISING AND POLITICAL ACTION. SHE ALSO RECALLED HER ATTENDANCE AT THE 1992 DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL CONVENTION. IT'S NOT JUST THE GOVERNMENT, SHE CONCLUDED: "THE PEOPLE OF BANGLADESH WANT PRESIDENT CLINTON TO VISIT."

15. (C) FOREIGN SECRETARY SOBHAN ECHOED THE PRIME MINISTER'S SENTIMENTS. THIS IS SOMETHING THE ENTIRE COUNTRY IS LOOKING FORWARD TO, HE SAID. HE ADDED THAT IN HIS VIEW, PRESIDENT CLINTON'S VISIT WILL BE AN IMPORTANT SIGNAL OF U.S. SUPPORT FOR BANGLADESH'S EFFORTS TO MAINTAIN DEMOCRACY AND GOOD GOVERNANCE. A CLINTON VISIT, HE SAID, WOULD BE A VERY POWERFUL SIGNAL TO THE PEOPLE IN BANGLADESH AND THE REGION, AND WOULD REINFORCE BANGLADESH'S COMMITMENT TO PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY. A DECISION BY THE PRESIDENT NOT TO COME WOULD, HE SAID, CAUSE "SERIOUS MISGIVINGS." HE ADDED THAT "WE DON'T HAVE EXAGGERATED EXPECTATIONS ... EVEN A ONE-DAY VISIT WOULD BE APPRECIATED."

A "GOLDEN AGE"?

16. (C) ON A ROLL, SOBHAN CHARACTERIZED THE LAST FOURTEEN MONTHS (SINCE THE ELECTION OF THE PRIME MINISTER) AS A "GOLDEN AGE" OF U.S.-BANGLADESHI RELATIONS. HE POINTED TO THE PRIME MINISTER'S TWO TRIPS TO THE UNITED STATES, HER MEETINGS WITH THE PRESIDENT AND MRS. CLINTON IN THE WHITE HOUSE, AND THE MICROCREDIT SUMMIT. HE ALSO NOTED THE RECENT INCREASE IN U.S. INVESTMENT, PARTICULARLY IN THE ENERGY FIELD.

GAS

17. (C) THE AMBASSADOR OBSERVED THAT IN THIS CONNECTION, THERE HAD BEEN CONSIDERABLE CONFUSION AND CONCERN ON THE PART OF A NUMBER OF THE U.S. COMPANIES THAT SUBMITTED BIDS JULY 16 FOR THE SECOND GAS ROUND. SOME AMERICAN COMPANIES ARE CONCERNED THAT ANOTHER COMPANY, NOT FROM THE U.S. (NOTE: SHELL. END NOTE), HAS BEEN GIVEN AN ADVANTAGE IN THE EVALUATION OF ITS BIDS. U.S. COMPANIES, HE STRESSED, WILL BE ABLE TO LIVE WITH THE RESULTS, SO LONG AS THE PROCESS IS FAIR AND OPEN, AND THE OUTCOME CLEARLY SERVES BANGLADESH'S NATIONAL INTERESTS.

18. (C) AFTER CONFERRING WITH THE PRIME MINISTER, PRINCIPAL SECRETARY SAMAD SAID THE EVALUATION PROCESS WILL BE TRANSPARENT, AND THE PLAYING FIELD WILL BE LEVEL FOR ALL COMPETITORS. THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE WILL SCRUTINIZE THE PROCESS, HE SAID, EVEN BEFORE THE "SHORT LISTS" ARE PREPARED. HE NOTED THAT OF THE FOUR CONCERNS ALREADY WITH CONCESSIONS IN BANGLADESH, THREE ARE AMERICAN. (NOTE: THE THREE ARE OCCIDENTAL, UNITED MERIDIAN, AND REXWOOD/OKLAND. IN ADDITION, HALLIBURTON AND UNOCAL HAVE CONTRACTUAL ARRANGEMENTS WITH OTHER CONCESSIONAIRES. END NOTE).

19. (C) THE PRIME MINISTER ASSURED THE AMBASSADOR THAT THERE WOULD BE "ABSOLUTE FAIRNESS" IN THE EVALUATION OF THE BIDS, AND SAID THAT SHE HAS GIVEN VERY SPECIFIC INSTRUCTIONS TO THOSE WHO ARE WORKING ON IT TO TREAT ALL COMPANIES FAIRLY. SAMAD ADDED THAT THE PRIME MINISTER HAD ASSIGNED HIM TO OVERSEE THE PROCESS. HE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT CREDIBILITY IN THE BID ROUND IS "TERRIBLY IMPORTANT."

UNOCAL SIGNING PROPOSAL

10. (C) THE AMBASSADOR THEN MADE A SPECIFIC SUGGESTION - THAT THE BDG MOVE QUICKLY IN APPROVING THE PSC (PRODUCTION-SHARING CONTRACT) FOR THE UNOCAL SHAHBAZPUR PROJECT, SO THAT THE AGREEMENT COULD BE SIGNED DURING ASSISTANT SECRETARY INDERFURTH'S VISIT TO BANGLADESH ON SEPTEMBER 10-12. THE PRIME MINISTER RESPONDED, "SURE; I THINK IT WOULD BE POSSIBLE." SAMAD SAID THAT HE THOUGHT THAT IT WOULD BE POSSIBLE

"AT LEAST TO INITIAL" THE CONTRACTS, BUT AMBASSADOR HOLZMAN PRESSED TO HAVE A REAL SIGNING, SO THAT UNOCAL COULD BEGIN ITS WORK AT THE OUTSET OF THE COMING DRY SEASON, AND MAKE GOOD ON ITS AGREEMENT TO DELIVER GAS TO POWER PLANTS FOR THE ENERGY-STARVED WESTERN REGION (SHEIKH HASINA COMES FROM THIS REGION).

SECURITY CONCERNS

11. (C) THE PRIME MINISTER CLOSED BY NOTING HER APPRECIATION FOR THE USG'S PROTECTION OF HER FAMILY IN THE UNITED STATES, AND REQUESTED ITS HELP IN APPREHENDING ANY PEOPLE SUSPECTED OF HER FATHER'S KILLING WHO MIGHT BE IN THE UNITED STATES. AMBASSADOR HOLZMAN NOTED THAT IF ANY OF THE SUSPECTS WERE IN THE UNITED STATES, THEY WOULD PROBABLY REQUEST ASYLUM; AFTER THAT, THEIR FATE WOULD BE IN THE HANDS OF THE COURT SYSTEM, WHICH COULD MOVE VERY SLOWLY. DCM ADDED THAT THE USG WOULD APPRECIATE ANY INFORMATION THE BDG MIGHT HAVE ABOUT ANY SPECIFIC THREATS TO MEMBERS OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S FAMILY, SO THAT WE CAN PASS THIS INFORMATION TO LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT AUTHORITIES.

COMMENT

12. (C) THIS WAS A VERY CORDIAL FIRST MEETING. THE AMBASSADOR BEGAN BY GIVING THE PRIME MINISTER A POPULAR AMERICAN CHILDREN'S BOOK FOR HER NEW GRANDDAUGHTER, AND THIS CLEARLY PUT THE PRIME MINISTER IN A VERY FRIENDLY FRAME OF MIND.

13. (C) THE BDG IS PULLING OUT ALL THE STOPS FOR A CLINTON VISIT. ANYONE WHO IS PERCEIVED BY THE BDG TO HAVE ANY INFLUENCE OVER THIS DECISION CAN EXPECT TO BE LOBBIED, AND LOBBIED HARD.

HOLZMAN